

This week, the Senate will be voting on a historic health care reform package that can help fix our nation's broken system. I am proud to have been a part of crafting the House proposal for health care reform and look forward to working with the Senate, the White House and the American people to put forth a final bill that President Obama can sign. I know that this will only be achieved through great amounts of compromise and that some issues that are my priorities may not be included or addressed the way I think best. This is the nature of democracy. However, there are three general components that I believe must be included in any final legislation in order to accomplish true reform to the health care system.

One of my top priorities in this effort is to include an individual mandate. I understand that the word "mandate" is a dirty word for some, but it will provide greater stability and lower costs for all Americans, including affordability for the middle class, security for our seniors and responsibility to our children. Most importantly, having a mandate will allow health insurance providers to spread the risk which would reduce the premiums. The more people have health insurance, the more risk is spread among providers thus lowering the costs of health care. This is the cornerstone of our efforts to reform the health care system, to make health insurance more affordable and attainable to all.

Second, we must also ensure a marketplace for individuals and employers to purchase quality and affordable health insurance. Such a marketplace would foster transparency and accountability that our current health insurance market lacks. The Health Insurance Exchange in the House proposal provides the opportunity for those who are not offered health benefits through their employers or do not qualify for government-sponsored health care coverage access to more affordable plans through a system that functions much like the Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan, just like Members of Congress have access to. This exchange is necessary if we impose a mandate on people. In our current economic climate, it would be unreasonable to require someone to purchase health insurance when costs are out of reach for so many people.

Lastly, I support the inclusion of an independent medical board that can make recommendations on how we reign in health care costs. Our current system has evolved to include perverse incentives that reward physicians for the quantity of care they provide, not the quality. With the creation of such board, we can study outcomes-based medicine and preventive care, as well as proactively involve physicians and health care providers to make recommendations for better practices. After all, our health care providers truly understand the realities of treating patients.

A healthy nation makes a strong nation. The 46 million uninsured people, the rising health care costs, denial of coverage even when one has insurance and the ever-decreasing number of employers who are not providing benefits because it is too costly are just a few ways in which our current health care system is not working. Reforming the system is vital, not only for the health of our nation, but for the health of our economy and we must do so by working together to deliver real change to our system. That's what this health care debate is about. It's about making us a stronger, healthier nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle", written in a cursive style.